

Style guide



Introduction

We write to communicate with our audience – to convey our ideas in the clearest way possible. Correct spelling, punctuation and grammar are important and, if you get it wrong, can lead to misunderstanding from your audience. But there's more to good writing than that. We need to write consistently, in a way that lets our audience understand who we are and what we're about.

This guide will help you communicate clearly and with confidence in a way that demonstrates Herefordshire Council's values. It will also provide guidance on how to write in a clear and consistent way.

You should use this guide for all of your writing on behalf of Herefordshire Council. This includes internal or external publications, letters, formal emails, reports, presentations, internal communications channels, websites and social media.

Our tone of voice

The way we write and the language represent who we are and what we stand for. By using a consistent tone of voice in our writing, we can make sure that our values shine through and people know they are communicating with Herefordshire Council. By writing clearly and concisely, we can make sure that our message is understood.

When you write, always remember that we're real people working very hard to help residents of the county. Crucially, we communicate in a way that reflects this approach and embodies our PEOPLE values.

Our values

Herefordshire Council's PEOPLE values are designed as a set of principles to shape the future culture, guide the way it acts, what is said, and how we make choices and decisions. The way we write should therefore reflect our PEOPLE values and bring them to life:

- People:** Treating people fairly, with compassion, respect and dignity
- Excellence:** Striving for excellence, and the appropriate quality of service, care and life in Herefordshire
- Openness:** Being open, transparent and accountable
- Partnership:** Working in partnership and with all our diverse communities
- Listening:** Actively listening to, understanding and taking into account people's views and needs
- Environment:** Protecting and promoting our outstanding natural environment and heritage for the benefit of all

Being true to these values means reflecting their sentiments in our tone of voice and writing style. It also means using natural, every day and active language. This guide shows you how to do that.

Use the right words

- Use language from our values and bring them to life. Which values underpin your piece of writing? People, excellence, openness, partnership, listening or environment? Try to identify this and use related language, such as 'enabling', 'striving', 'transparency', 'working together', 'understanding', and 'protecting'.
- Use 'we' and 'us' and 'our' as much as possible. When you need to name the organisation, use phrases such as 'At Herefordshire Council, we...'
- Use natural, everyday language and avoid being overly formal. For example, use 'before', 'next to' and 'start' rather than 'prior to', 'adjacent to' and 'commence'.

Use the right words

- Make writing active and decisive, rather than passive. This shows the council to be proactive and decisive. For example: 'Cabinet meets next week' not 'A meeting will be held by Cabinet next week.'
- Always be aware of your audience and use language they will understand. This means making complex information easy to understand. Use short words, and find simple alternatives to technical terms and business jargon. For example: 'The consultation revealed a wish for the council to work in partnership with local communities and parish councils to deliver rural transport services.' not 'Public feedback confirmed that residents want the council to support local communities and parish councils to review travel demands in their areas so that they would be able to develop local solutions and approaches to transport.'
- Use co-operative vocabulary like 'help' and 'work with' to show that we work as a team – we want to help others and show they have a part to play too.

Our style guide

&-Ac

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Use 'and' unless for a brand name (such as Marks & Spencer), or a tweet where space is limited.

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Don't overuse them. It looks plain silly!!!

Abbreviations

Try to avoid abbreviations and acronyms. If they are required, write in full first with the abbreviation in brackets.

For example: Historic Environment Record (HER).

Occasional abbreviations are acceptable on Twitter where space is limited.

Accessibility

Never use all capitals in headers. Many screen readers read capitalised words as an acronym or miss the word out altogether.

When referring to a website, embed links into a phrase which tells the user which website will open when they click the link.

For example: 'You can find further information on the Herefordshire Council website.'

Never embed a link into the phrases 'click here', 'here' or 'link', as this is unclear to screen readers.

Refer to the 'Equality and Diversity Guidelines' as required.

Active and positive

Active verbs and sentences show the council to be decisive and proactive.

For example: 'Cabinet meets next week' not 'A meeting will be held by Cabinet next week.'

Positive sentences encourage a positive reaction, can be more concise and clear and show the council is taking a 'can do' approach. So instead of: 'We cannot supply you with refreshments if you do not reply by Monday', use: 'We can supply refreshments if you reply by Monday'.

Our style guide

Ad-Ca

Addresses

Write addresses in full. For example: Herefordshire Council, Plough Lane, Hereford HR4 0LE.

Apostrophes

Apostrophes have two uses:

- They show that letters have been taken out of a word. For example: 'do not' becomes 'don't'.
- They also show belonging. For example: 'The officer's report' says that a report belongs to an officer.

Take care with plurals:

- If the owner already ends with an s, place the apostrophe at the end. For example: 'The managers' agenda' refers to an agenda belonging to a group of managers.
- Exceptions are plurals that do not end with 's', such as 'children'. For example: 'Widemarsh Children's Centre'.

Between

Capital letters

Write 'between x and y', not 'between x-y'.

Use capital letters for proper nouns and names, such as 'Herefordshire Council'. Use small case when referring to 'the council'.

Use capitals for service or team names, such as 'Trading Standards' or 'Children's Services'.

Use capitals for job titles and elected Members. For example: Councillor John Jones, Cabinet Member for Infrastructure.

Use upper case for committee names, such as 'General Overview and Scrutiny Committee' or 'Cabinet', or if you are referring to the elected Council.

The 'county' or the 'city' is lower case.

Never use capital letters for EMPHASIS – this looks like shouting.

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Ch-D

Chairman	Say chairman, but not chairperson, chairwoman or chair.
Collective nouns	All organisations are singular: The council is, the hospital is, the government is.
Colons	Colons are used at the end of a sentence: it shows that an answer, elaboration or explanation will follow.
Commas	If a sentence includes lots of commas, consider if the sentence can be split into new sentences for clarity.
Council vs LA	Never use local authority or LA to refer to the council.
Councillor	The first time you mention a councillor, use title and name in full: Councillor Joanna Backbencher; in subsequent mentions use Councillor Backbencher. Do not shorten to Cllr.
Court cases	Please contact the communications team if you intend to issue information relating to a court case.
Dates	Use the following format: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 18 July 2017• Always write the month in full• Do not use commas, 'th', 'nd' or 'rd' after the number• If the day is required, write: 'Tuesday 18 July 2017'• Use numeral formats on social media if space is limited: 18/07/2017• For combined years, use 2017/18 not 2017-18
Directions	Use lower case north, south, east and west unless part of a region (such as West Midlands).

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E-In

Ellipsis (...)	To indicate an edited quote, use three dots. Otherwise ellipsis can be used to show an incomplete sentence.
Email	Write as one word: email.
Email addresses	Write email addresses in full, in lower case and as active links. For example: Email: jonah.jones@herefordshire.gov.uk
Etc.	Do not use. It gives the impression that you have run out of ideas.
Equality and diversity	See the 'Equality and Diversity Guidelines' for further information.
Full stops	Do not use full stops in headings, titles, addresses, or after initials and abbreviations.
Government	Lower case even when specific: UK government.
Headings and titles	Only the first letter of the title is a capital. For example: 'Recycling and waste' not 'Recycling and Waste'. An exception is if the heading includes a name, such as 'Pay your Council Tax'.
Headteacher	Write as one word: headteacher.
Hyphens	Place names such as Ross-on-Wye should use a hyphen. Compound words are hyphenated (i.e. two words put together to make a new word). For example: sub-committee, vice-chairman. The hyphen is half as long as a dash and has no space either side of it.
Internet terms	Write as one word and use lower case: internet, intranet, web, website and online.

Our style guide

ise-La

-ise

Use this in words like specialise and organisation, not the American z. Default your Microsoft Word spell check to English (UK) to avoid using '-ize'.

Jargon

Use everyday words your audience is likely to understand. Avoid jargon, technical terms and acronyms. If you do have to use a technical term, make sure you explain it.

Job titles

Capitalise job titles, such as Sarah Smith - Communications Officer.

For long job titles, always place the title after the name. For example: David Jones, Chief Executive of Trading Standards.

Layout

Clear presentation and logical ordering can make a big difference to the quality and effectiveness of your writing:

- Use precise headings in a logical order
- Single line spacing and a single space after full stops
- Text should be aligned left – not justified
- Use bullet points for lists and complex information
- Page numbers – place on the bottom middle of the page unless there is a good reason otherwise
- Paragraphs should cover one theme and be a maximum of four to six lines for ease of reading
- Be concise - a sentence with more than 25 words can be difficult to follow
- The corporate typeface is Arial and the type size should be 11 point. See the brand guidelines for more information

Our style guide

Li-Mr

Lists and bullet points Use a colon to indicate a list is to follow:

- List items should flow on from the introductory sentence
- List items should start with a capital letter
- Do not add punctuation after each line
- Use numbered lists when order or priority matters
- Limit items to six per list and no more than two levels
- Where possible, put the longest item in a list last – this aids skim reading

Ltd. plc

Do not use unless you are using a company's address or writing for a business publication.

Measurements

Write in numerals.

Spell out measurements at first mention, then use abbreviations. Don't use a space between the numeral and abbreviated measurement. For example: 3,500 kilograms then 3,500kg.

Use the imperial/ metric convention specific to your department.

Use Celsius for temperature: 37°C

Money

Written money formats:

- 25p (no space, no point)
- £1.50, £5 (not £5.00), £50 (not £50.00)
- Thousands – use £500,000 then £500k subsequently
- Millions and billions - use £1 million, then £1m subsequently

Mr, Mrs, Ms, Miss

Find out if women are Mrs, Miss or Ms; do not use Ms unless they do. No full stop after Mr, Mrs, or Ms.

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Nu-Qu

Numbers

Also see 'Money'.

- Fractions - Write in full (a quarter, a third)
- Percentages - Use per cent not percent. Percentage is one word. Always use % with a number
- Spell out one to nine, then use numbers for 10 and above. Use numbers if there is a mixture of numbers under and over ten in the same paragraph, such as 'the vote was split 9 to 29'
- Use the comma in thousands (such as 1,350)
- Use figures for numbers alongside units of measurement (1 mile, 2 per cent, 9am). Use figures for number ranges, such as 3 to 5 years
- Write first, second, third, not 'firstly', 'secondly' or 'thirdly'
- Write decimals in full, such as 7.6 or 0.07 – but not .07

Paragraphs

Do not indent the first line and keep paragraphs short.

Proofreading

Always proofread written material – it is much better to get someone else to proofread your work if possible.

Quotes

For direct quotations, there are three main methods:

- Bob Smith said he was “very happy” with the results of the survey.
- Mrs Jones said, “Thank you to the environmental health officer who helped me last week.”
- Councillor Anthony Johnson, leader of Herefordshire Council, said:

“The council tax rise will allow Herefordshire Council, parish councils, fire and police authorities to continue to deliver their services at a local and county level.

Our style guide

Q-We

“Herefordshire Council will continue to secure the best value for money when delivering statutory services which enable residents to lead safe, healthy and independent lives.”

Note that, in the third example, you omit the double quotation marks from the end of each paragraph other than the last one. This indicates to the reader that the quote is continuing.

References

Use the format: title, author’s name, publisher and date. For example: Changes to Education, Paul Smith, Herefordshire Books, July 2016.

Register Office

Not Registry Office.

Seasons

Use lower case autumn, winter, spring, summer. Capitalise in a title, such as Autumn Statement.

Telephone numbers

Telephone: 01432 260000 - no commas, dashes or brackets.

Times

6.30am, 7pm (no spaces).

For a time-span use 9am – 10am (posters / social media) or 9am to 10am (written text).

Write elapsed time in full, such as the meeting took 3 hours, 25 minutes and 55 seconds.

Trade names

Avoid using trade names unless they are relevant to the text. Trade names should be capitalised, such as Portacabin, Sellotape and Hoover.

Weblinks

Embedded links needs to be explicit and tell users which website will open when they click the link.

For example: ‘You can find further information on the Herefordshire Council website’.

When using web addresses in posters and leaflets, do not use ‘http’. Complex links can be shortened by request using the web request form on the intranet.

For example: www.herefordshire.gov.uk/planningservices

Our style guide

Wy

Wye Valley NHS Trust Wye Valley NHS Trust in full, not Wye Valley. If you use WVT, it must only be once you've used the name in full – Wye Valley NHS Trust (WVT).
The name of our general hospital name is The County Hospital, Hereford. Please use this name in full.

Please contact the communications team if you need any help or assistance.

Email: communications@herefordshire.gov.uk